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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 003646

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SUBJECT: INDIA SEEKS DIALOGUE ON NEPAL END-GAME

REF: NEW DELHI 3494

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt, for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

1. (C) Summary: PolCouns and Poloff met with MEA Joint Secretary (North) Ranjit Rae on May 13 to review A/S Rocca's

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and Indian Ambassador Shiv Mukherjee's recent audiences with Nepal's King Gyanendra. Rae emphasized that the King had not relented on his opposition to a dialogue with the parties, which required continued US and Indian pressure on the palace. The GOI is still debating what supplies it will provide to the RNA, but Rae suggested it may be time for the US and India to begin looking beyond issues of military supplies to political solutions. End Summary.

2. (C) Sharing the text of public remarks in Kathmandu, PolCouns relayed A/S Rocca's strong message emphasizing the need for progress on the three R's (release of detainees, restoration of civil liberties, and reaching out to the political parties) and improvements on human rights as a prerequisite for additional assistance. Rae sought clarification of A/S Rocca's call for "substantial progress," noting that he needed to emphasize that aspect of the USG position within the Indian government, and then provided a read-out of Mukherjee's May 9 meeting with King Gyanendra.

Gyanendra's Message to Ambassador Mukherjee

3. (C) Rae said the King told Ambassador Mukherjee that the parties must take a clear stand on terrorism and corruption for him to deal with them, and reviewed the progress he had made on his "assurances" to PM Manmohan Singh in Jakarta, such as ending the Emergency. The monarch also promised to do more in the next month to lift the remaining restrictions, reportedly stressing, "I am committed to democracy."

4. (C) Mukherjee pressed the King to take the parties' position seriously. The monarch responded that he would ask his Ministers to engage the parties, but reiterated his view that restoration of the previous Parliament would be impossible because it was unconstitutional. The parties consider the Ministers illegitimate and will not accept discussions with them, Rae observed, but if the King were serious about restoring Parliament, he could find a way to do so that meets his constitutional concerns. Rae had no sense that the King intended to work with the parties, adding "I feel he is restoring the panchayat regime" by appointing loyalists throughout the government in advance of any proposed elections.

Keep Pressure on the King

5. (C) Rae worried that if the King does not agree to a rapprochement with the parties, then the parties' positions will harden, leading to further radicalization and alignment with the Maoists. The news that the Maoists have "welcomed" the parties' joint statement is an indication of the coming polarization, he warned, which is "fraught with serious implications." Therefore, the USG and GOI needed to use the parties' statement as a point to start negotiations, keeping pressure on the King with "whatever leverages we have," he stated.

6. (C) Rae agreed with PolCouns that it was not the place of the USG or the GOI to lay out a roadmap for a political solution to the impasse, but argued that it was time to start looking past the short-term question of how much military assistance to provide, and to consider what a final political outcome to the King-party standoff and the Maoist insurgency would look like. Since the Maoists supported the parties' platform (and possibly influenced it through back-channel contacts), it could serve as a starting point for peace negotiations, if the King agrees to accept it as such. India and the US should try to bring everyone together for a comprehensive peace process, he suggested.

Military Assistance Still Debated

7. (C) Although the GOI decided on May 6 to release non-lethal military supplies that were "in the pipeline," Rae said the government was still debating internally what

constitutes the pipeline. The MEA was supporting the view that the term encompasses vehicles, jackets and thermal imagers that were at the border waiting for shipment on February 1, while the MoD was pushing for a broader definition that covers all supplies that the RNA had requested before the royal takeover (to include ammunition). For now, nothing is planned for delivery beyond the small amount at the border, but the GOI would meet later in the day to continue discussions on what to send to the RNA, Rae stated.

18. (C) Rae again agreed (reftel) that a discussion between the US DAO and Indian military on RNA ammunition needs would help to determine the correct level of assistance to provide to Nepal.

19. (C) Although the Indian Communist parties have protested even the resumption of this non-lethal aid, the Congress party leadership had smoothed over the dispute by telling them "it's only some vehicles," Rae said. As a result, the anticipated Parliamentary debate on the decision to resume supplies did not occur prior to the end of the current session.

Comment

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10. (C) The Indian media has characterized the internal GOI debate over how much assistance to provide to Nepal as policy "U-turns," complicating efforts by the GOI to use military assistance as a lever on King Gyanendra as leaks to the press undermine the "message" sent to the monarch and cause objections from both ends of the domestic political spectrum to the perceived shift. Nevertheless, the MEA appears confident that the suspension of aid has thus far prodded the King to make some positive moves, releasing some detainees and taking small steps in restoring civil liberties, and believes that the right combination of pressure from the US, India, and UK could motivate him to work on the third R: reaching out to the political parties. Even when pressed, Rae did not indicate any clear GOI preference for a way forward, but he did signal strongly the Indian desire to deepen our bilateral consultations on long-term end game issues.

BLAKE